Tourism Oxford

Embrace our rural routes

5-YEAR TOURISM PLAN
2025–2030

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CONSULTING INC.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tourism Oxford is the official Destination Management Organization (DMO) for Oxford County. This tourism plan will guide the organization's tourism management, product development and marketing efforts for the next five years.

1 – OXFORD COUNTY'S DNA

To describe the DNA of Oxford County is to tell a story of who settled in the area both past and present. Oxford's DNA is inspired by family/community traditions and our natural, man-made and cultural environments.

Rich farmland has resulted in a diversity of items grown and produced here. The natural landscape inspires artists. Innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit thrive.

This DNA has resulted in authentic travel experiences and stories, inspiring and engaging visitors.
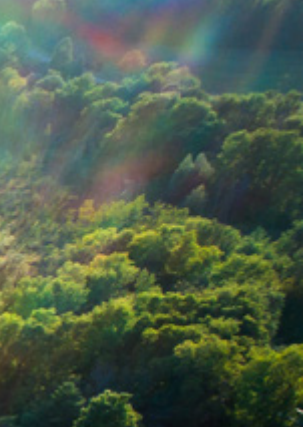
2 – INTRODUCTION

A phased approach to tourism planning.

Oxford County is located in central, southwestern Ontario. There are two million people living within a one-hour drive and six million people within a two-hour drive of Oxford County.

Figure 1: Map of Oxford County and its location in Ontario, Canada

Tourism Oxford, the official Destination Management Organization (DMO) for Oxford County, commissioned the development of a five-year plan.

This plan will guide the organization's tourism management, product development and marketing efforts for the next five years.

1 Environmental Scan Situation Analysis

Project kick-off

Tourism asset analysis

Opportunity review

Aligned trends and strategies

Environmental scan report

2 Community Engagement

Engagement plan

Focus Groups

Interviews

Online surveys

Key findings report

Strategic priorities workshop

3 Strategy Development

Draft vision, mission, goals

Draft strategy

Business engagement

Refine strategy

Implementation plan and performance measures

Council presentation

High quality publication

Figure 2: Strategic Planning Process
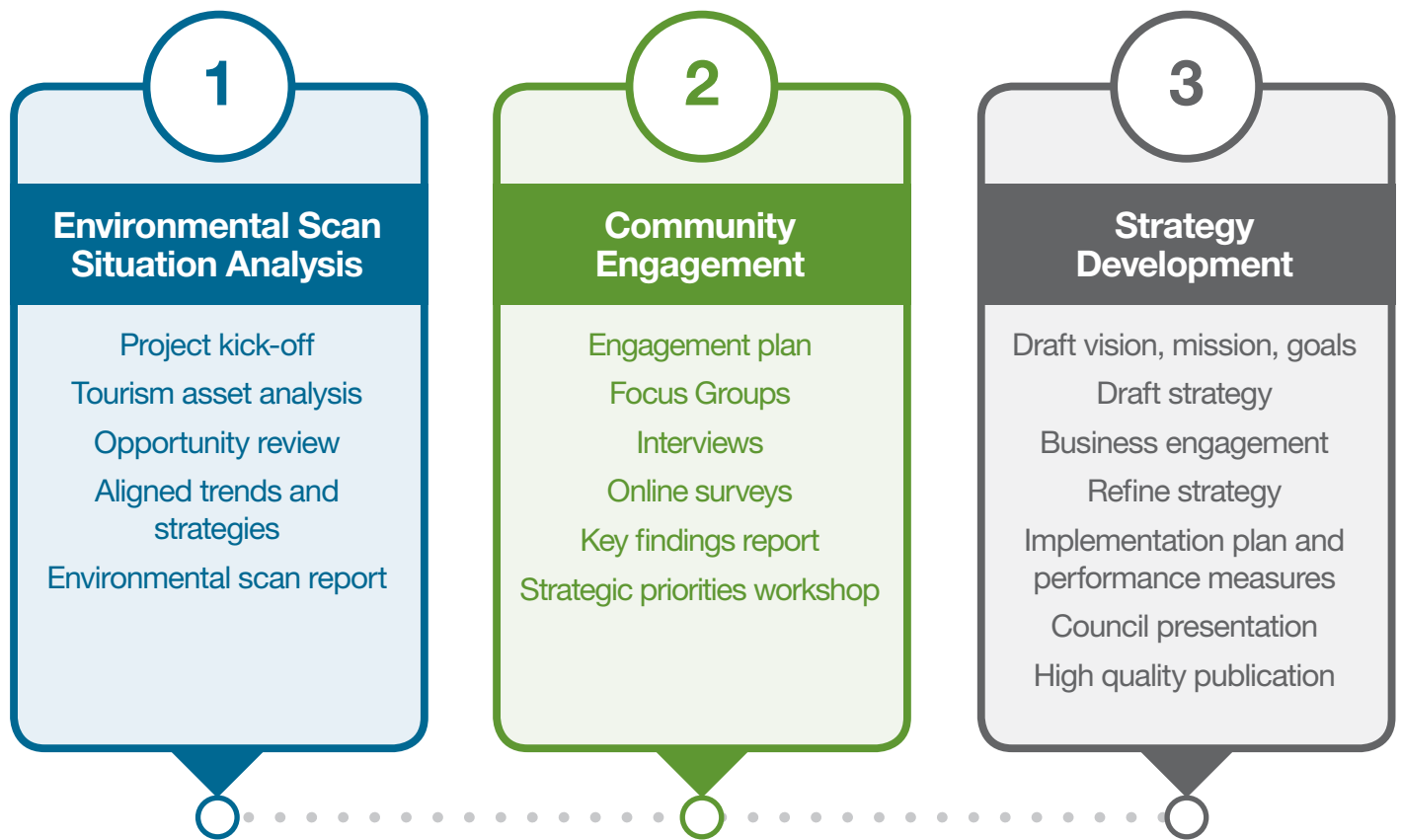
The process of developing the Tourism Plan consisted of three phases: Environmental Scan, Community Engagement and Strategy Development. The Key Findings Report issued in July 2024 provided a detailed account of the environmental scan and analysis of the tourism sector and the comprehensive community engagement reflecting insights from visitors, tourism-related businesses and residents.

3 – WHY TOURISM MATTERS

Building communities and economic opportunity.

Tourism is an important economic driver for Oxford County. It brings new money into the local economy and contributes to the tax base. Visitor spending helps diversify and stabilize the local economy, creating local jobs and business opportunities. Tourism also helps attract additional businesses and services to support tourism-related businesses.

In addition to the economic impacts, tourism can support community services and facilities that would otherwise not be built and accessible to residents. Tourism promotes civic pride and provides cultural exchange between hosts and guests. It encourages community beautification and revitalization, promotes the conservation and preservation of natural, cultural and historical resources and contributes to the overall quality of life for residents.

As of April 2024, there were over 190 tourism businesses actively engaged with Tourism Oxford services. This is an increase of 80 businesses in the last decade. The level of engagement has also intensified to include coaching and partnerships.

Tourism is an important economic driver for Oxford County. It brings new money into the local economy and contributes to the tax base.

The largest share of these 190 operations are farms or farm market-related businesses, followed by retail operations and restaurants. There were 3,415 people employed in the tourism sector in Oxford County in 2021 (tourismdatacollective.ca).

There has been a steady increase in tourism investment in Oxford County since 2020, including two Nordic spas, three cheese factories, two breweries, four new attractions and two new accommodations, as well as significant investments in existing tourism operations. Tourism experiences have also grown from four experiences in 2018 to 27 in 2024.

Tourism development like the Oxford County Cheese Trail, Oxford Fresh, cycling routes and trip itineraries have sparked visitor interest in Oxford County. In 2023 Tourism Oxford had 215,572 website views, 27,141 social media followers, 4,500 email subscribers and 432 visitor package requests. This volume represents over the past decade, a 700% increase in website sessions, 800% increase in social media followers and 2,700% increase in visitors inquiries.

In 2023, Oxford County welcomed 670,000 Canadian and US visitor trips, equalling 1.4 million nights in the County[1].

The average same day visitor to the region spends $90 during their visit. This figure jumps up to $244 per person for overnight visits. Currently, one in four visitors stay overnight[2].

1   "Visitors" is the unique visitor count of travelers who spent one or more nights in the destination over the respective time period. Source: Environics Analytics, VisitorView
2   Tourism.research@ontario.ca based on Statistics Canada microdata, 2021

Length of Stay, Ontario Southwest, 2021

Overnight
24%

Same-Day
76%

$90
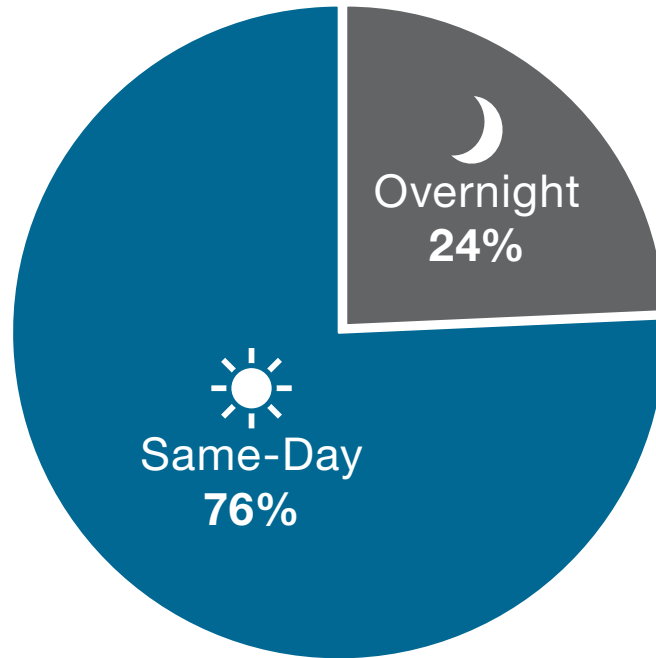
Average spend per same
day visitor
Ontario's Southwest, 2021

$244

Average spend per person
per overnight visit
Ontario's Southwest, 2021

4 – A VISION FOR TOURISM IN OXFORD COUNTY

Looking to the future.

Oxford County's tourism industry is poised to move forward after a period of great upheaval during the global pandemic.

This five-year plan establishes a road map for Tourism Oxford and its partners, capitalizing on Oxford County's unique tourism offerings, enhancing the County's strengths and addressing areas of challenge and opportunity. It is based on what was learned during the Environmental Scan in Phase 1 and the Community Engagement in Phase 2.

The vision outlined below describes the final destination or desired end state for tourism in Oxford County. The mission is the call to action, describing what Tourism Oxford and its partners will do and why.

VISION

A vibrant tourism destination that contributes to Oxford County's economic, social and environmental wellbeing.

MISSION

To build resiliency in the tourism sector in collaboration with residents, businesses and local government through:

- **Destination Management:** Monitoring sector performance, driving strategy and delivering efficient and effective operations.

- **Product development:** Advancing unique, quality tourism offerings in a welcoming and supportive environment.

- **Marketing:** Marketing Oxford County with the right message at the right time to the right audience.

4.1 – GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The five-year plan includes five goals and related objectives. The goals describe the broad-based end state that is needed to achieve the mission. The objectives describe the desired outcome as a result of the end state.

GOAL	OBJECTIVE
ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT	Tourism is an important contributor to the County's economy, environmental sustainability and overall well-being.
RESILIENT, THRIVING TOURISM INDUSTRY	Tourism businesses have the data, tools and resources and coaching they need to thrive.
COMPELLING PRODUCT OFFERING	Oxford County's tourism offerings and experiences build on the unique character of the region, welcoming and delighting visitors year-round.
EFFECTIVE MARKETING AND PROMOTION	Tourism Oxford's marketing and promotion is efficient, effective and provides high-quality customer service.
COLLABORATIVE TOURISM NETWORK	Tourism partners are engaged and work collaboratively for their mutual benefit.

4.2 – STRATEGIC ACTIONS

The following pages outline the strategic actions that Tourism Oxford and its partners will undertake. Strategic actions are the specific, measurable tasks designed to achieve the aligned goals and objectives.

	ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT	Tourism is an important contributor to the County's economy, environmental sustainability and overall well-being.

This five-year plan has been designed to align with the priority areas established in the Oxford County Strategic Plan: promoting community vitality, enhancing environmental sustainability and fostering progressive government. Tourism Oxford and its partners will focus on tourism activity that benefits businesses and residents in Oxford County. Measuring and reporting on the economic, environmental and social impact of tourism ensures that these priorities remain in the forefront for all decision makers.

Tourism Oxford will work with its partners to identify and target visitors that have the greatest potential to align with the County's objectives. While day visitors will always be in important segment of the tourism market,

Tourism Oxford can foster greater economic impact through an expanding inventory of itineraries that encourage longer, overnight visits year-round.

Highlighting locally owned and operated businesses differentiates Oxford County as a destination and maximizes economic impact in the community.

Tourism Oxford takes its commitment to sustainable tourism seriously. It can encourage environmentally friendly practices through education, monitoring and recognition programs. It should also continue to work with local municipalities to explore transit options, starting with high-volume events and peak times.

Related actions

1. Develop efficient systems to measure, monitor and report on:

   a. The economic, social and environmental impact of the tourism industry.

   b. Tourism trends and research identifying high yield, low impact markets and product offerings with the greatest benefit to the County.

   c. Tourism impact on businesses, residents and visitors, including over tourism.

2. Demonstrate, foster and celebrate tourism development that supports environmental sustainability and overall well-being in Oxford County.

3. Celebrate sustainability achievements and provide resources for visitors to make their travel more sustainable.

4. Work with transit providers to increase visitor access and use of alternative transportation options.

Tourism Oxford will work with its partners to identify and target visitors that have the greatest potential to align with the County's objectives.

RESILIENT, THRIVING TOURISM INDUSTRY

Tourism businesses have the data, tools and resources and coaching they need to thrive.

Thriving tourism businesses are the building blocks of a vibrant tourism industry. As the destination management organization (DMO) for the County, Tourism Oxford is responsible for leading and supporting local tourism businesses, ensuring they have the data, tools, coaching and training they need to survive and thrive.

Tourism signage supports the tourism sector by building awareness of the tourism offerings in the County, providing assurance to travellers that they are on the right path, encouraging visitors to extend their time in the County, facilitating product clusters or itineraries and promoting individual tourism attractions. Tourism Oxford should continue to implement the destination signage plan incorporating and supporting municipal signage strategies and encouraging tourism operators to participate in the provincial TODS[3] program when appropriate.

Tourism Oxford is uniquely positioned to develop County wide programs, monitor tourism activity at the County level and serve as a conduit for sharing regional, provincial and federal data, programming and funding with local operators. It is also best positioned to inform County Council and other community leaders on overall industry performance and advocate for policies and programs that support the tourism sector.

There are a variety of community partners that assist businesses in Oxford County with essential skills such as business planning, financial management and overall business success. Tourism Oxford should ensure tourism businesses are familiar with these services and may, when appropriate, work with these community partners to develop programming specific to the tourism industry.

Finally, customer service delivered by all businesses strongly influences the overall impression of the visitor in the County. In addition to ongoing training efforts, Tourism Oxford can encourage a focus on customer service with a program that recognizes businesses that are exceeding visitors' expectations.

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3   Tourism Oriented Destination Signing https://www.ontario.ca/page/tourism-signs-ontarios-roadways

1. Develop and implement a tourism industry communication plan that:

    a. Provides easy access to industry data and resources for tourism partners.

    b. Provides training and updates for tourism related businesses on tourism trends, consumer preferences and other relevant data.

    c. Provides municipal and county councils and staff with annual updates on the impact of tourism in Oxford County.

    d. Gathers feedback from businesses on training opportunities and needs.

2. Support tourism businesses and organizations with:

    a. Experiential tourism training.

    b. Market readiness and customer service training.

    c. Marketing training and supports.

    d. Diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility training and certifications.

3. Continue to implement the Oxford County destination signage plan including:

    a. Working with municipalities to implement the community hub signs.

    b. Installation of itinerary and general visitor signage at businesses.

    c. Promoting the provincial Tourism-Oriented Destination Signage (TODS) wayfinding signage program in Oxford County.

4. Recognize and celebrate excellent customer service by tourism businesses.

Oxford County's tourism offerings and experiences build on the unique character of the region, welcoming and delighting visitors year-round.

Compelling attractions and experiences are critical to the resilience and overall success of Oxford County's tourism sector. Tourism Oxford and its partners should build on the popularity of its rural-based offerings, including the Cheese Trail, to explore new experiences and attractions that are related to and build on those already on offer. Tourism-related businesses need assistance and training to build their appeal and revenue base by establishing a repertoire of tourism experiences.

Tourism Oxford Pillars

PRIMARY PILLARS

TOURING
(Tour Oxford: Embrace our Rural Routes)

- Experiences
- Town and country diverse attractions
- Cycling

CULINARY
(Oxford County Cheese Trail & Oxford Fresh)

SECONDARY PILLARS

GREEN TOURISM
(Sustainable tourism experiences and offerings)

OUTDOORS
(waterways, trails)

Oxford County's primary markets are the urban centres that surround it. Tourism-related businesses must be prepared to address the cultural and dietary needs of these more diverse populations.

In addition to providing a welcoming environment for all guests, consumers expect tourism operators to adopt environmentally friendly practices. Sustainability and Rainbow Registered certification programs provide straightforward guidelines that help tourism operators understand and meet the program requirements. They also provide consumers and Tourism Oxford with assurances of the businesses' commitments to these principles.

The Key Findings Report documented the strong alignment between Oxford County's safe and picturesque trails and roadways and consumer interest in hiking and cycling in rural settings. Tourism Oxford should continue to support and participate in the implementation of the cycling and hiking trail master plan with tools that help visitors and residents to plan for and enjoy their experience.

Related actions

1. Celebrate partners that invest in sustainability, accessibility, Rainbow Registered and other DEI[4] programs and training.

2. Support the implementation of the cycling and hiking trail master plan, with visitor-focused information, including trail information including maps, distance, uses, grade, and etiquette.

3. Maintain the tourism innovation grant partnership program.

4. Expand shoulder season tourism product and collaborations.

4   Diversity, equity and inclusion.

EFFECTIVE MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Tourism Oxford's marketing and promotion is efficient, effective and provides high quality customer service.

Tourism Oxford's marketing programs are intended to target the right people with the right message at the right time. Consumer targets should include urban centres within a three to four-hour radius of Oxford County, including the Greater Toronto Area.

Tourism stakeholders also said that the time is right to target the U.S. market. Tourism Oxford can leverage its marketing budget by partnering with regional and provincial partners such as Ontario's Southwest and Destination Ontario, targeting these key markets.

Tourism Oxford's 2023 Technology Report identified actions to ensure Oxford County stays current with best practices in digital tools and tactics. Key among these recommendations were establishing a **CRM**[5] program and website improvements for TourismOxford.ca. Adapting to evolving technology will be an important element in reaching prospective and returning visitors and ensuring the efficient operations of the Tourism Oxford team.

The primary motivator for a large share of the visitors to Oxford County is visiting friends and relatives. Campaigns targeting residents will build their awareness of the tourism experiences available in Oxford County and make it easy to become county ambassadors for their guests while building civic pride.

Tourism Oxford can help build the marketing knowledge and capacity of local tourism operators by offering training on digital marketing and consumer segmentation, including **EQ**[6] and **PRIZM**[7], developing cooperative marketing programs and coaching.

Tourism Oxford also has an important role in developing and delivering marketing programs that promote tourism experiences at the County level. These campaigns should build on the rural and small towns theme to include profiles of locally owned businesses and experiences. Marketing campaigns should also profile operators who have achieved Rainbow Registered and sustainability certifications.

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5   Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software manages all interactions with current and potential visitors including calls, customer service interactions, marketing emails, etc.

6   Explorer Quotient (EQ) is the Canadian Tourism Commission's proprietary market segmentation research for the travel market based on demographics, geography and psychological factors

7   The PRIZM Segmentation system developed by Environics Analytics features 67 market segments based on demographics, lifestyles and values of Canadian travellers.

Finally, continuing to build direct connections with consumers through the email newsletter and social media fosters an ongoing relationship between individual consumers and the County that encourages repeat visits. Tourism Oxford's custom-made itineraries add to the personal touch and were specifically referenced by visitors as a valued element in their experience with the county.

Tourism Oxford's custom-made itineraries add to the personal touch and were specifically referenced by visitors as a valued element in their experience.

Related actions

1. Create a new TourismOxford.ca website with an integrated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database, as outlined in the 2023 Technology Report.

2. Develop a new visiting friends and family (VFR) ambassador program to generate awareness, visitation and civic pride.

3. Celebrate sustainability, DEI and local cultural stories in Tourism Oxford marketing.

4. Continue to educate tourism operators on consumer segments and digital marketing.

5. Increase the number of engaged Tourism Oxford email subscribers.

6. Continue to target key markets and desired high-yield visitor segments identified through market research.

7. Partner with Ontario's Southwest and Destination Ontario in U.S. targeted marketing activities.

The need for greater collaboration was a common theme during the stakeholder engagement interviews and focus groups. Tourism Oxford's partners would welcome opportunities to meet with the Tourism Oxford team to learn about tourism initiatives, plan collaborative efforts and build a cohesive tourism offering. A formal schedule of meetings with municipal councils ensures that key decision-makers are aware of tourism's economic, social and environmental impacts and the various programs and efforts offered throughout the year.

Scheduling pro-active meetings with tourism-related businesses gives Tourism Oxford an opportunity to learn about any changes to the organization and its offerings, monitor tourism activity, identify emerging trends, encourage participation in cooperative programs and special events and identify areas where Tourism Oxford can support their organization.

Tourism Oxford should continue to coordinate marketing partnership programs that provide a cost-effective solution for tourism operators, which is aligned with overall Tourism Oxford programs and activities.

During the consultation, tourism operators reported that their guests frequently asked for suggestions on what to do next in Oxford County. The familiarization tour offered for tourism operators in 2024 was very popular and should be expanded to include a video feed so that front-line staff not able to attend in person can still learn about the variety of tourism attractions and experiences in the county. A formal listing of related tourism experiences and nearby attractions can help tourism operators support their guests and encourage longer stays in the county.

Tourism Oxford is a regular participant in regional tourism events including those offered by Ontario's Southwest and the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO). Tourism-related businesses in Oxford County would also benefit from these events and Tourism Oxford should encourage their participation by informing operators about the events, and organizing carpools or other cost-saving measures.

Related actions

1. Meet annually with municipal and tourism partners to share information, identify collaboration opportunities and support tourism development.

2. Continue to develop Your Next Stop travel itineraries, encouraging tourism operators to promote complementary nearby attractions.

3. Increase business engagement with Tourism Oxford staff through networking events and technology enhancements.

4. Provide marketing incentives for businesses to pilot new collaboration and product development ideas.
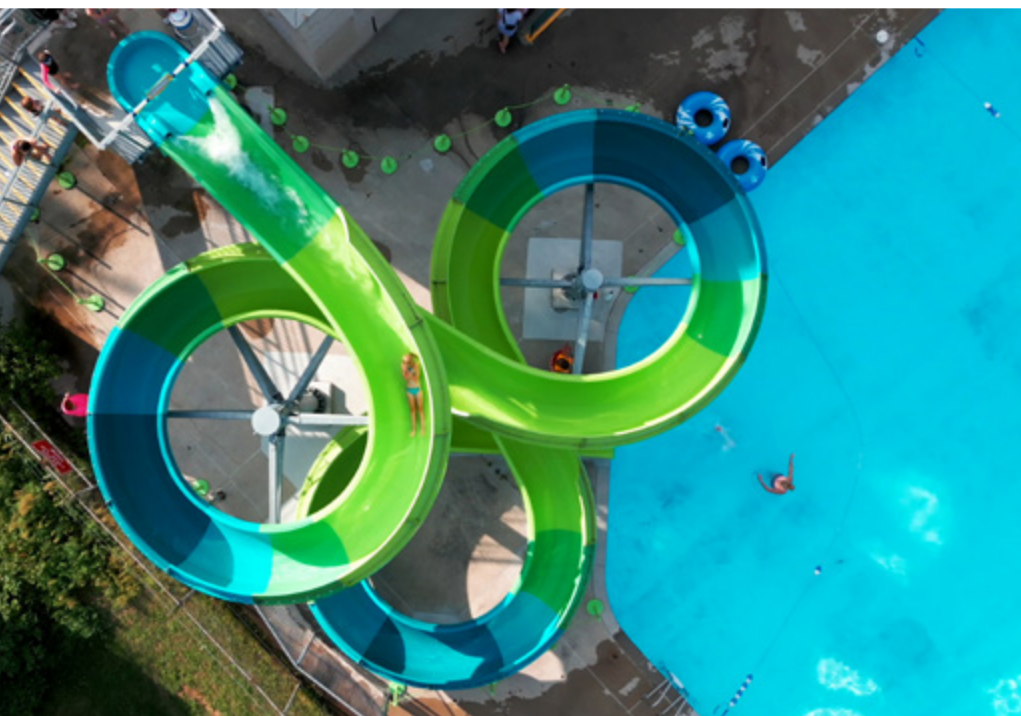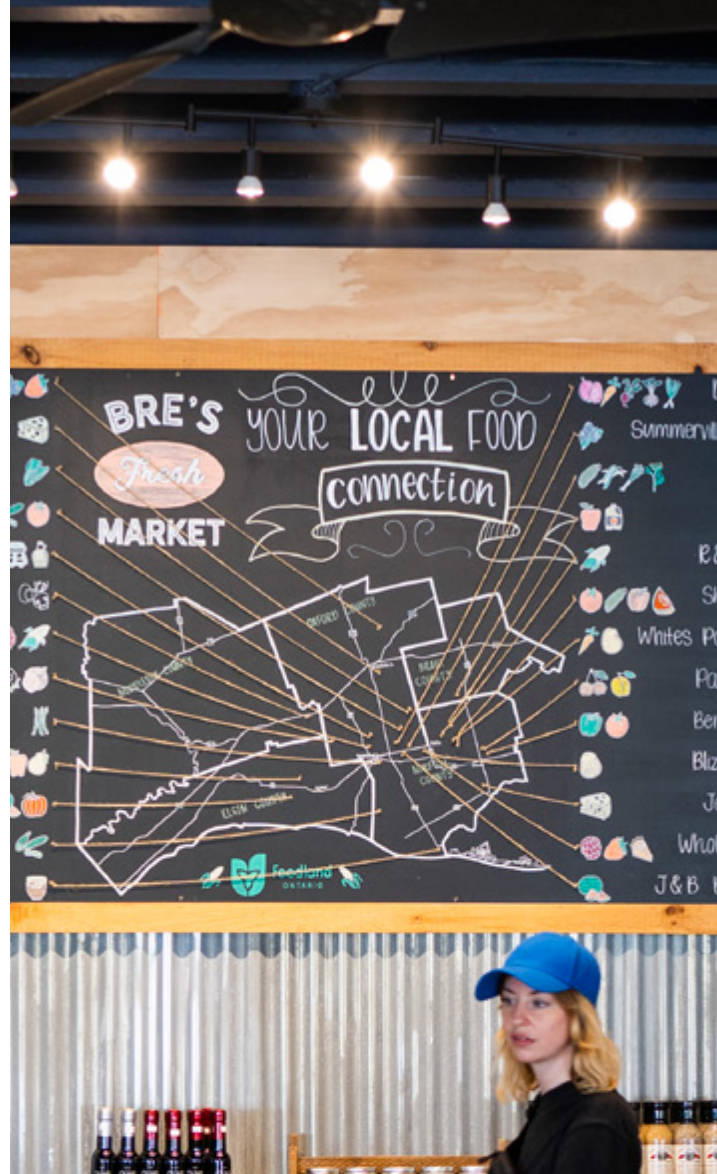
5 – PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION

Moving from vision to reality.

The Implementation Plan is the final step in the strategic planning process. Implementation is the key to moving from the vision of a vibrant tourism destination that contributes to its economic, social and environmental well-being to reality.

Tourism Oxford and its partners have successfully grown the tourism sector in the past ten years. This growth has put pressure on the limited resources of Tourism Oxford's team of 3.3 full-time equivalents (FTEs). The Implementation Plan will need to identify areas of efficiencies and potential areas for increasing resources or reducing some services to fulfill the recommended actions.

The Implementation Plan outlines key partners for each action, along with the recommended timeline, priority level and estimated budget. The Implementation Plan also includes performance measures that will allow Tourism Oxford to track its progress and identify any areas for modification.

Providing regular updates to Oxford County Council will build on the positive momentum and reinforce the community's commitment to implementing the plan.

TOURISM OXFORD 5-YEAR PLAN AT A GLANCE

VISION

A vibrant tourism destination that contributes to Oxford County's economic, social and environmental well-being.

MISSION

To build resiliency in the tourism sector in collaboration with residents, businesses and local government through:

Destination Management: Monitoring sector performance, driving strategy and delivering efficient and effective operations.

Product development: Advancing unique, quality tourism offerings in a welcoming and supportive environment.

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GOALS & OBJECTIVES

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT

Tourism is an important contributor to the County's economy, environmental sustainability and overall well-being.

RESILIENT, THRIVING TOURISM INDUSTRY

Tourism businesses have the data, tools and resources and coaching they need to thrive.

COMPELLING PRODUCT OFFERING

Oxford County's tourism offerings and experiences build on the unique character of the region, welcoming and delighting visitors year-round.

EFFECTIVE MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Tourism Oxford's marketing and promotion is efficient, effective and provides high-quality customer service.

COLLABORATIVE TOURISM NETWORK

Tourism partners are engaged and work collaboratively for their mutual benefit.

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Tourism Oxford

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